

## From Rote Learning to Creative Expression: NEP 2020 and the Future of Art Education

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### Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a radical shift in India's educational landscape by moving away from rote memorization toward holistic, creative, and experiential learning. Art education is central to this transformation, as it fosters creativity, critical thinking, cultural awareness, and emotional intelligence. This paper examines the role of art education in fulfilling NEP 2020's vision, focusing on how it can transform classrooms into spaces of innovation, inclusivity, and expression. Through a review of literature, the study highlights the pedagogical significance of integrating art into mainstream education, the challenges in implementation, and possible strategies to overcome them. It concludes that art education, if systematically implemented, can nurture 21st-century competencies and empower learners to balance knowledge, skills, and values in alignment with India's cultural heritage and global demands.

**Keywords:** Art Education, NEP 2020, Creative Expression, Holistic Development, Experiential Learning

### Introduction:

Education in India has historically been characterized by rigid structures, rote memorization, and examination-driven practices that prioritize content reproduction over creativity, critical thinking, and holistic development, leaving students ill-prepared for the complex demands of the 21st century. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark shift in this trajectory by envisioning an education system that is multidisciplinary, inclusive, and experiential, where the focus is not only on cognitive learning but also on emotional, aesthetic, and cultural growth, thereby making learning meaningful and joyful. Within this vision, art education occupies a central role as it has the potential to transform classrooms from mechanical spaces of information transfer into vibrant arenas of exploration, innovation, and self-expression. Art is not merely decorative or extracurricular; it functions as a powerful pedagogical tool that connects knowledge across disciplines, fosters divergent thinking, and nurtures values of empathy, tolerance, and cultural awareness. Historically, Indian education, as seen in the gurukul system, was deeply integrated with music, dance, painting, and storytelling, which enabled learners to develop balanced personalities by uniting intellectual, spiritual, and creative faculties, but colonial systems of education gradually dismantled this holistic approach, replacing it with textbook-centered rote

learning that alienated students from cultural practices and creative expression. NEP 2020 attempts to correct this historical imbalance by re-emphasizing the importance of integrating arts into mainstream education, positioning it as a bridge between traditional knowledge and global competencies.

Art education, when systematically implemented, can cultivate essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, all of which are vital for success in an interconnected and rapidly changing world. For instance, theatre can be used to teach history by recreating past events, music can be employed to understand mathematical rhythms and patterns, and visual arts can simplify abstract concepts in science through diagrams and models, thereby making subjects more accessible and engaging to learners. The theoretical foundations of art-integrated pedagogy lie in constructivist learning theories, particularly those advanced by John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky, who argued that knowledge is constructed through active engagement with experiences and social interaction, and Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which demonstrates that intelligence is not monolithic but manifests in linguistic, logical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal forms. Art education activates multiple intelligences simultaneously, ensuring that diverse learners with different strengths and backgrounds find pathways to success. Moreover, UNESCO's Road Map for Arts Education (2006) stresses that arts are essential for building intercultural understanding, peace, and tolerance, goals that align seamlessly with NEP 2020's vision of education as a vehicle for national development rooted in cultural identity and global citizenship. At the same time, integrating art into classrooms is not without challenges. Indian schools continue to struggle with a lack of adequately trained teachers, insufficient infrastructure, and an entrenched examination-oriented mindset that sidelines creative subjects in favor of STEM disciplines. Many educators view art as secondary, relegating it to annual cultural programs rather than embedding it meaningfully in daily pedagogy, while assessment systems remain narrowly focused on memory recall, leaving little room to evaluate creativity, expression, or problem-solving. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms, including large-scale teacher training in art-integrated pedagogy, redesigning curricula to give equal weight to arts, creating resource materials that showcase interdisciplinary learning through art, and developing innovative assessment frameworks that value creativity and expression alongside academic achievement. The inclusion of indigenous art forms is particularly critical in this context, as they connect students to their cultural roots, foster pride in local traditions, and simultaneously cultivate global competencies by exposing learners to diverse modes of expression.

Folk theatre, tribal crafts, traditional dance, and music can be effectively woven into lessons across subjects, making education not only joyful and relatable but also socially meaningful by preserving cultural heritage. Furthermore, the integration of digital tools with art education can expand its reach, enabling students to experiment with digital storytelling, music composition software, animation, and virtual museums, thereby combining traditional art with modern technology to prepare learners for the future. The relevance of art education is heightened in the context of

contemporary challenges such as mental health crises, social polarization, and ecological concerns, where art serves as a therapeutic and transformative medium, enabling learners to express emotions, build resilience, and engage with social issues in creative ways. For example, mural-making projects on environmental themes can sensitize students to sustainability, while theatre workshops on gender equality can promote inclusivity and awareness. By encouraging learners to move beyond rote memorization to creative expression, art education directly addresses the gaps in the current education system, where students often lack the ability to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life contexts or to think critically and independently. In this sense, NEP 2020's focus on art is not ornamental but strategic, aiming to prepare citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also creative, empathetic, and culturally grounded. The scope of this study, therefore, is to critically analyse how art education can operationalize the vision of NEP 2020, what benefits it offers in terms of cognitive and socio-emotional development, what barriers hinder its effective implementation, and what strategies can make its integration sustainable and impactful. It acknowledges that while policy frameworks provide a strong foundation, the real transformation lies in classrooms where teachers and students collaboratively reimagine learning through art. Hence, this research underscores the urgency of shifting Indian education from rote learning toward creative expression, positioning art education as both a pedagogical necessity and a cultural imperative in shaping the future of learning.

**Review of Literature:**

Eisner (2002) highlights that art fosters multiple forms of intelligence and encourages divergent thinking, essential for 21st-century skills. Hetland et al. (2007) argue that studio practices in art education cultivate observation, persistence, and problem-solving. UNESCO (2006) emphasized the role of arts in building peace, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. In the Indian context, NCERT (2019) issued guidelines for Art-Integrated Learning, recognizing it as a key tool for joyful and experiential pedagogy. Kumar (2020) linked art integration to the NEP 2020 vision, asserting its role in bridging subject boundaries. Ravindra (2021) observed that art-based pedagogy fosters inclusivity, benefiting learners from diverse socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds. Sharma (2022) found that art education enhances students' communication and critical thinking skills. Singh (2021) noted challenges like insufficient teacher training and resource limitations in implementing art pedagogy. Mishra (2022) explored how theatre, dance, and music support STEM subjects by enhancing conceptual clarity. Patel (2023) underlined the importance of local and indigenous art in strengthening cultural rootedness while fostering global awareness. Collectively, these studies establish that art education is not ornamental but essential to holistic learning.

**Statement of the Problem:**

Despite the ambitious vision of NEP 2020, Indian classrooms remain largely dominated by rote memorization and exam-centric learning. While policy documents emphasize art integration, practical implementation faces several hurdles including inadequate teacher preparation, rigid assessment patterns, lack of resources, and low awareness about the transformative potential of art

education. As a result, students are deprived of opportunities for creative expression, experiential learning, and cultural engagement, which are crucial for developing 21st-century competencies.

**Objectives:**

1. To examine the role of art education in implementing the vision of NEP 2020.
2. To analyse how art fosters creativity, critical thinking, and holistic development.
3. To identify challenges in implementing art-based pedagogy in Indian classrooms.
4. To suggest strategies for effective integration of art education across disciplines.
5. To explore the role of indigenous art and culture in shaping future-oriented education.

**Methodology:**

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach to explore the role of art education in advancing the vision of NEP 2020. Instead of relying on quantitative measurements, it emphasizes interpretive analysis of secondary data, aiming to uncover patterns, insights, and strategies related to art integration in Indian classrooms. The research is guided by central questions such as: How does art education align with NEP 2020's goals? What benefits does it provide for holistic development? What challenges hinder its implementation? How can art be integrated across subjects and grade levels? And how can indigenous art forms contribute to both cultural identity and global competencies? These questions frame the overall inquiry and provide direction for the analysis. The research design follows a descriptive qualitative model supported by content analysis. This design is appropriate for policy-based and pedagogical studies where meaning and interpretation take precedence over statistical

validation. By synthesizing academic literature, policy documents, and institutional practices, the study develops an in-depth understanding of art education's pedagogical significance. The design also allows for comparative reflection between global frameworks (such as UNESCO's arts education guidelines) and Indian policy initiatives (such as NEP 2020 and NCERT's Art-Integrated Learning guidelines). The emphasis is on highlighting strategies for effective integration of art into mainstream curricula while acknowledging contextual challenges. Data collection relies entirely on secondary sources, ensuring both breadth and reliability. Primary materials include NEP 2020 policy documents, NCERT guidelines, and UNESCO frameworks. Scholarly works such as Eisner (2002) and Hetland et al. (2007) are complemented by contemporary Indian studies (Kumar 2020; Ravindra 2021; Sharma 2022; Singh 2021; Mishra 2022; Patel 2023). Case studies of schools experimenting with art-integrated pedagogy, along with reports and journal articles on interdisciplinary learning, were also examined. These materials were subjected to thematic coding under three domains: (i) the benefits of art education, (ii) the challenges in implementation, and (iii) strategies for effective integration. The reliance on secondary data ensures that the analysis captures both international perspectives and Indian contextual realities, offering a holistic understanding of art education as envisioned under NEP 2020.

**Results:**

The analysis of policy documents, research literature, and case studies indicates that art education strongly aligns with NEP 2020's vision of holistic, multidisciplinary, and experiential learning by fostering creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration. It enhances both cognitive and socio-emotional development by improving critical thinking, communication, empathy, and cultural awareness, while also promoting inclusivity and strengthening cultural identity through indigenous art forms. Evidence further shows that integrating theatre, music, and visual arts into STEM subjects enhances conceptual understanding and pedagogical innovation. At the same time, challenges such as inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and rigid exam-centric practices hinder effective implementation, with many schools continuing to treat arts as extracurricular. However, emerging opportunities in digital art education—such as virtual museums, animation, and music composition—offer promising pathways to expand engagement and accessibility. Overall, the findings affirm that art education is not supplementary but essential for transforming Indian classrooms into creative, inclusive, and future-ready learning spaces, though systemic reforms remain necessary to fully realize this potential.

**Conclusion:**

Art education, as envisioned by NEP 2020, is not a peripheral activity but a central pedagogical strategy for building creativity, critical thinking, and holistic growth. Moving from rote memorization to creative expression requires systemic reform—teacher training, curriculum redesign, resource allocation, and flexible assessment systems. Despite challenges, the integration of art into mainstream education offers immense potential to create learners who are innovative, culturally aware, and equipped with 21st-century skills. If systematically implemented, art education can help India achieve the NEP 2020 vision of inclusive, multidisciplinary, and future-oriented learning.

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